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ABSTRACT

This collection of guidelines for the Kent School District (Washington) Management Team addresses ways to develop good communication skills and interpersonal communication as they apply in interviews with broadcast journalists, members of the news media, and other public relations agencies. Specifically mentioned are: the development of personal and professional contacts; guidelines for keeping credibility with the media; guidelines for good press relations; preparing a news release; how to control the release of negative information in news reporting; strategies for interview techniques; hints for television interviews; and suggestions for effective television presentations. Also provided is a list of the news departments and assignment desks of Seattle (Washington) television and radio stations with their addresses and telephone numbers. (DB)

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The Media and You...A Working Relationship

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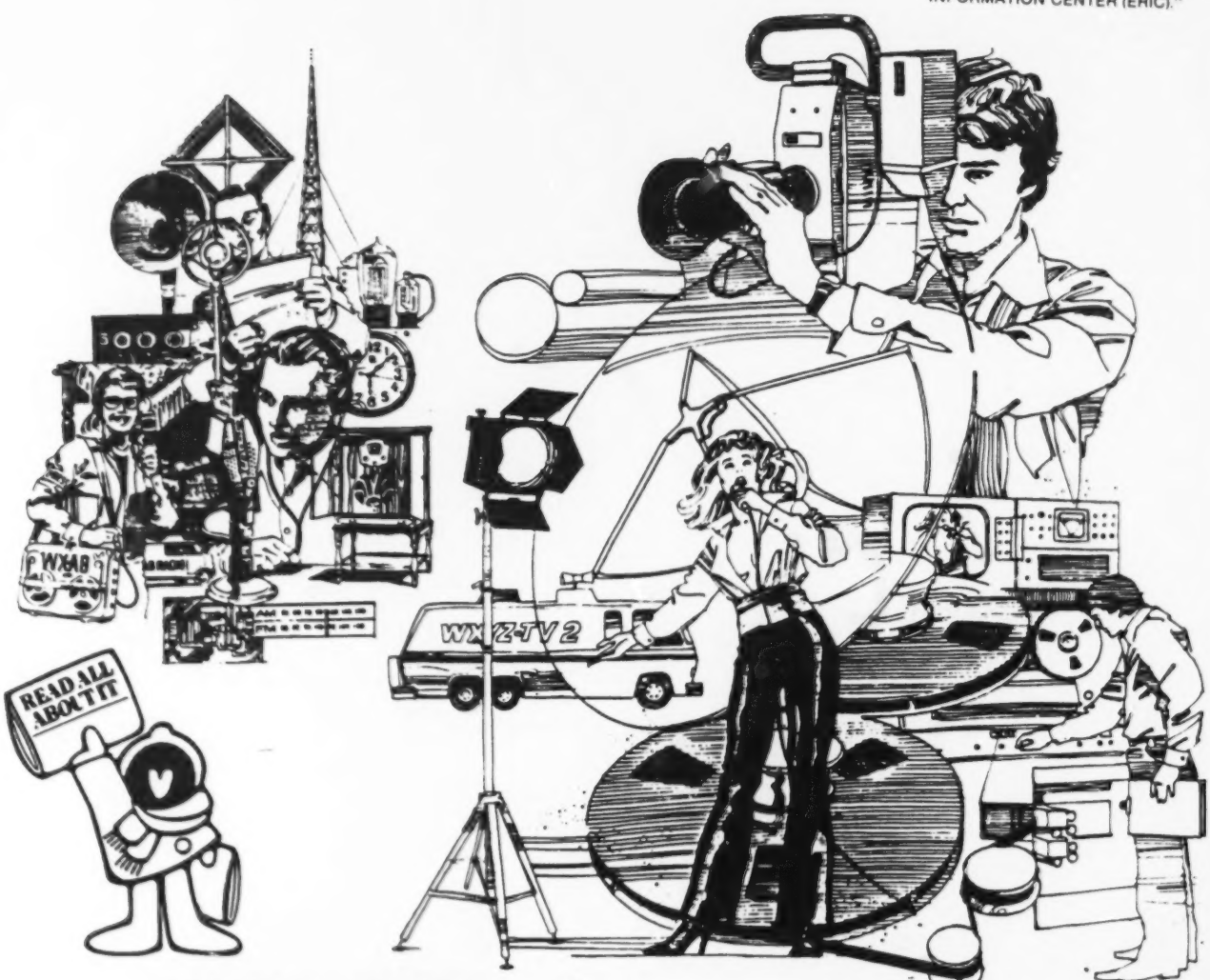

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The Media and You...
A Working Relationship

A Handbook for the
Kent School District Management Team

Prepared by the
Public Information and Communications Department
Judy Parker, ASPR
Clara Kristofferson

July, 1988

Using the Back Door

THE KEY IS TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN CONTACTS. Unfortunately, we cannot call all the media daily so developing some contacts of your own are important...and will follow you to any job locations in the Puget Sound area.

* Members of your school community are friends and neighbors of reporters, editors, etc. This is the best way to get positive coverage. Find out who in your school community can make a contact for you.

* If a parent or business person gives your school a compliment on a program or on something that impressed them, ask them to take five minutes and write a letter to the editor of the Valley Daily News or the South Times. People will take note of the positive feelings a fellow community member has.

* The valley newspapers have a "School" column. They agree to run everything from PTA and carnival announcements to honor rolls.

* The South Times has a column called " Hats Off To..." They'll run names and achievements of people in our area.

* Have a teacher, parent or your school media contact make an invitation to a reporter by sending a special note from a student. Reporters are buried in press releases and black and white paper. They are likely to take notice if a classroom invites them to something with an artsy, handwritten request. Follow up with a call to explain just what this idea includes.

* Remember that holidays are slow news days. Plan release of information for the day after a holiday when the media hungers for news. Also the "fifth" week of the month is usually slow...no board or council meetings.

If your school is taped for television, please let the Communications Office know so we can tape it.

"Some days you feel like the bird...other days, you feel like the statue." unknown

Too often, people are quick to say that the press never covers any good news. They say, "How come they're never here when we want them, but always here when we don't need them?"

Last year our district received 7,958.5 inches of newspaper space (only academic stories...no athletics) plus tv minutes. Though many of those stories are fun , they are also interesting and can contribute to changing the image of the school system. Every time the media covers your school, it's free publicity for all of us.

Your staff may be very good sources for the media. They may know someone at a newspaper, radio or television station. They may be willing to write an article for a community column. They may make calls and follow-up calls to try to get coverage for your school. That's a great technique called "using the back door." Call the communications office if you need help. Sometimes we know of stories underway that your ideas could attach to. You can get positive coverage if you make the effort and know the right paths to follow. Each Friday we send out the "Events" covering the coming two weeks. You'll be sent a form, "Hot Items." We use those items to create the events.

By sending the "Hot Items" form: you give the communications office a chance to see what is going on and possibly cover a story for the Dialogue and you give your school the chance to end up on the "Events" that goes to all stations, and papers. Whether your school receives actual coverage or not, hundreds of people have read what your school is doing and received a message that your school is up to good things. Remember that TV will cover visual stories about children who are doing unusual and unique projects as well as stories about a child who is making it after a hard path or a story about a staff member who is going out the way to help kids.

Remember that the media does not exist to serve as cheerleaders for the Kent School District or your school. They are watchdogs. It's their job to ask tough questions.

It is extremely important to keep two-way, open communications with the media. The way they portray our actions can make the difference in our community image. Here are some guidelines for keeping your credibility with the media.

Accuracy: All reporters will quickly tell you there are some sources they trust. The ones they trust get better coverage. Every item we send them or tell them over the phone is checked for accuracy (including spelling). It may take a few extra moments to check but in the long run will keep our credibility.

Be Ready: Make sure you have researched what you need to know before you meet with a reporter. You should have basic facts about your school available (enrollment, number of teachers, opening and closing times, total staff). However, if a question is raised and you simply do not know, be honest. Tell the reporter you will get the details and call him/her before the deadline...then follow through. If you are confident and know what you are talking about, the reporter is more likely to stand behind you.

Share the Bad News As Well As The Good: It is extremely important to admit setbacks or mistakes and to share them. This alleviates the shroud of mystery so often connected with large institutions. If we share our problems as well as our achievements, reporters will not always be looking for hidden skeletons.

Be Aware Of What Is Going On Around You: Make sure you know what is happening in the district and the world around you. How can you tie in a project at your school with local, state, and national issues? Elements of a good story are visual, human interest, different/unique or with a lesson.

Help, Don't Hinder The Communication: If you can get the answer, do it and pass it on without extra bureaucratic hoopla! Reporters hate the wild goose chase for information. Don't put them on hold.

Target Messages To Hit The Right Audience: A reporter or assignment editor must be lured into covering a positive story. They will be here for the problems. Never call reporters just before their deadlines. That's usually late afternoon. Their minds are occupied with other things and they will forget your call. Remember that television must have a visual story. You will have to express to them the visual part of your project. No talking heads, meetings, etc. but action shots of students doing something will get their attention. Awards are nice and very important but a blurb about an award is probably the best you can get unless the person has overcome unbelievable handicaps to achieve success.

Be Available: Make sure the media can contact you easily. If you are out of the building be sure the person answering the call knows who should answer the call.

Watch Out for Jargonese: We all get lost in educationese such as time on task, IEPs, SLOs, ESDs, etc.) Reporters don't know what those words mean. Their story must be simple enough for a person on the eighth grade level. Help them out. Have a simple explanation. Don't give them figures without ready reference about what that means to Dick and Jane!

Guidelines to Good Press Relations

1. Don't be defensive. Defensiveness is often taken as a sign of guilt. If you can answer a reporter's question, do so honestly.

2. When a reporter calls, respond promptly. If you will be out, be sure a system is established for handling news media inquiries.

3. If news media personnel can't make it to cover a story, offer to drop some notes off at the newspaper, or provide a telephone report for radio stations.

4. Keep in mind that all reports are public property. You must provide this type of data to the news media, if it is requested. Rough drafts, working papers, and preliminary figures are not necessarily included. Call the communications office if you have a specific question.

5. Be aware of deadlines. A story is of little use if you've missed the deadline and it has become old news. The media has fixed deadlines.

6. Avoid educational jargon. If you use it, explain it.

7. If you don't have the answer, it's OK to say, "I don't know for sure, but I'll call you back in 10 minutes." Then be sure to call back.

8. If your information includes complex numbers and figures, round them off.

9. Nothing is ever "off the record." While you may ask a reporter to not print or broadcast certain information, he or she may proceed to obtain the same information from another source. This does not mean that reporters should not be briefed. Most will respect your desire to hold on a story, temporarily.

10. Never ask a reporter to show you a story before it is published.

11. Never say, "No comment."

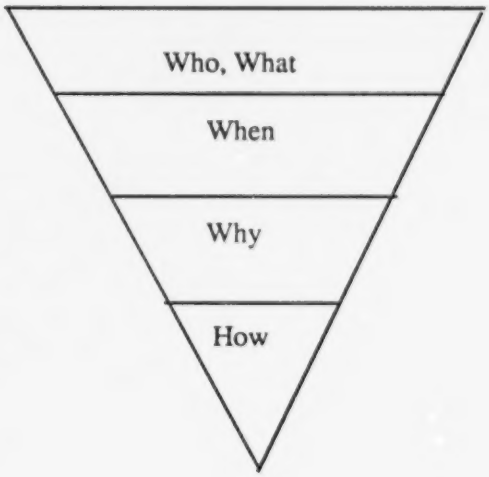
12. After an interview, let key people know about it . This approach avoids conflicting information.

13. And, if a reporter has done what you consider a good job, don't forget to say THANKS!

Preparing a News Release

When you are preparing a news release to send directly to the media, remember these tips:

1) Begin with the most important facts first and answer who, what, when, where, and why.
2) Don't clutter your lead paragraph with verbiage.
3) Write the way you speak.
4) Use active verbs and short familiar words.
5) Take time to organize your ideas before you begin.
6) Don't use educational/technical jargon.
7) Strive for short sentences and short paragraphs.
8) Use anecdotes and stories or quotes to humanize your facts.
9) Dramatize figures and statistics.
10) Don't editorialize. Just write the facts.



Always type your release on 8 1/2 x 11 white paper, double-spaced. In the upper left corner of each page put the "slugline." (Identification of the story, date and page number). Begin typing halfway down the page and leave one inch at the top of pages 2 - end. Use only one side of the paper. Type "more" at the bottom of each page except the last page. Type " - 30 - " to mean the end.

Before writing always ask yourself, "Who cares?" Target your audience and your information.

The Media and Bad News: What You Can Do

* Know who is the key district/school spokesperson.

* Know what is public information and what isn't. When in doubt, check with communications.

* Develop a crisis communication plan. It should include:
  What constitutes a crisis?
  Who is responsible for coordinating media information in a crisis?
  How is information fed to that person and when?
  Who is the district spokesperson? What's the order of preference?
  If law enforcement or emergency service agencies are involved, how will communications be coordinated?

*Cultivate a mutual atmosphere of trust with the reporters who regularly cover your school.

When the crisis hits...

If you presume that most media representatives will treat you fairly and report your story accurately if you cooperate with them--and you act accordingly--you'll be much happier with the results. Reporters have a job to do within a limited timeframe. They'll often "push" you to make a quick response or demand your immediate attention. If you try to block a reporter from covering your bad news, two things will happen: the reporter will get the story, anyway, and you'll have that much more trouble getting positive coverage. Look at bad news as an opportunity to establish or strengthen positive ties with the media.

* If you are aware of a potentially negative situation, consider going on the offensive by telling the reporters before it becomes public. This gives you an opportunity to manage the situation more effectively.

* "Take five" to figure out what the district and your school's public position is and frame a central, simple message that you want to communicate to your community. Then key all of your comments relative to the situation to meeting that objective.

* As soon as possible, put together a chronology or other kind of fact sheet. You may also be doing this for insurance. Use the same information.

* Be available! The reporter will get a comment somewhere. Better that it come from you.

* Never lie.

* Deliver your most important points in 45 seconds or less. That's all you get for TV. Get to the point and make every word count.

* Answer questions fully, but don't get lulled by a reporter's silence in to offering more information that you want to give...even if there is a camera on you.

* Write out all statements to be released in connection with the crisis. Don't ad lib or speak on the record without referring to the statement.

* Offer reporters coffee, access to a telephone or copier. Have a one page fact sheet on your school or worksite include the size of the district, superintendent and principal names (spelled correctly), and a general description of your school.

* Keep people in the district and your employees briefed. Let them hear it from you before they read it in the newspaper. Provide regular updates of information.

* If you don't have an answer, say so. But promise to get back with the answer in 10 minutes and DO.

* Admit it when you make a mistake. In the next breath, explain what you're doing to rectify the problem. Don't try to cover up.

* Get as much information out as possible. The less people know, the more they speculate.

* Do not offer the media personal opinions on or off the record when you are representing the school district.

* Be wary of taking reporters into your confidence. They are not paid to keep secrets.

* Sometimes reporters make mistakes. In such an instance, talk to the reporter about the error first. If there is a pattern of inaccurate reporting, start documentation to discuss with the editor. But, you'd better be sure before contacting the editor.

* Resist the temptation to make comments to or about the media at a public meeting. It makes the reporter feel uncomfortable and resentful.

* Avoid saying "no comment." Have some kind of answer or comment to make.

* Remember that this, too, shall pass.

Strategies for Interview Techniques

Needling	"Oh, come on now, you don't believe that, do you?	"Yes, I do, Mary, and..." Go on to another point.
Twisted Facts	"So your test scores are down again" (when the test has been changed or norms redrawn...)	"Perhaps I could clarify that..."
Putting words in your mouth	"So you're saying this community is cheap."	Don't repeat the loaded words, even in denial! Restate your point in your words.
False assumption or conclusion	"So I assume you're going to..."	"Well, Bob, I wouldn't agree with your conclusion..."
Baiting	"Why does this community group keep attacking you?	"Hal, that's something you might want to talk to them directly about. What I can tell you is that our school district is dedicated to..."
Pregnant pause	The reporter remains silent after you answer a question.	Don't blurt out more to fill the vacuum. Instead, ask, "Does that answer your question?"
Loaded question	"You don't deny that you've been collecting too much tax money in the past now that you've dropped your rate, do you?"	"Let me see if I understand your question..." Then rephrase it to your liking.

CONSENT AND WAIVER

During the time that my child or ward is a student in the Kent School District, I understand that (s)he may be the subject of photographs for the Kent Public School District to explain and support education and this school district in brochures, television spots, newspapers, slides and at large gatherings.

I give my full consent for these and similar uses for my child's or ward's photographic likeness, waiving any liability for Kent School District No. 415 or its directors or employees.

_____ _____

Student's Name Parent or Legal Guardian

_____

Date

A good rule of thumb is to ask parental permission if the story focuses on one student. If they are only using a comment from the child, it shouldn't be a problem. Special education students and other sensitive areas such as pregnant students, those in trouble with the law, etc. should also be treated delicately and with parent permission. The best method is to have the consent and waiver forms signed with the registration materials and place the form in the student file.

Special Hints Just for Television

* Story must be easily explained in 30 seconds.

* Good visual potential.

* Don't plan anything after 4:00 p.m. that you want covered...Reporters have deadlines. Focus on events. If you have an abstract idea such as release of new research findings be sure you have an expert available to answer questions and tie the findings to a student or student achievements.

* Write it tight. If you are sending a news release or a written invitation make it easy to understand and short. Call the day before your event to be sure the reporter has received your material.

* Show that your story is relevant. Use straightforward information to sell your idea.

* More news takes place on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday than on Monday or Friday. Take advantage of that and plan your event for a Monday or Friday.

Effective Television Presentations

While every radio and TV interview and talk show is different, there are some basic rules you can follow in any interview to make your presentation effective.

Be Prepared!

^ Make sure you are familiar with the format of the show. Listen or watch in advance.

^ Find out the interviewer's approach...consumer oriented? News oriented? What exactly is the topic and does the interviewer have the same position that you have.

^ Ask for the names of the other guests or questioners besides the host/moderator.

^ Read the paper before your interview in case a late news story breaks that affects your topic.

^ Anticipate questions and decide on your best response.

^ Decide on two or three important points you want to make and memorize them.

^ Do your homework to ensure that the facts supporting your position are quick and current.

Be Calm!

^ Avoid sitting between two questioners, especially if they are hostile. Take a seat to one side.

^ If you have a physical reason for preferring one profile (deafness in one ear,) tell the staff.

^ Keep your hands away from table mikes and don't look down or sigh heavily into lavaliere (around the neck) or clip-on mikes.

^ Don't drum your fingers or tape your feet.

^ Avoid quick body movements like standing up . You may be abruptly out of camera range.

Look Great!

^ Dress conservatively. Men should wear dark suits, solid (not white) shirts and dark socks. Women should wear a street length dress or suit and avoid white, deep red or small prints.

^ Don't wear loose or exceptionally heavy jewelry. Avoid flashy items that might distract.

^ Remove any nametags, pens, etc. from your pocket and from view.

^ Keep your head up. Lower chins look guilty.

^ Don't look at the ceiling or for divine intervention.

^ Don't wear photo-grey or tinted glasses.

^ Don't slouch or lean to one side. If you're standing, don't rock back and forth or put your hands in your pockets.

Take Charge!

^ Use related questions as a springboard to make your points.

^ Keep your answers short and direct and positive.

^ If you want to drop a topic, put a friendly cut-off into your answer.

^ Don't go off on a tangent unless you can steer the discussion to a more positive area.

^ Phrase your answers with the public in mind.

^ Take the time to think about your answer; don't feel pressured into instant responses.

^ If questioners don't allow you to finish your answer, state firmly and pleasantly that you'd like to answer one question at a time.

^ Always finish your answer before taking on the next question and don't repeat a hostile question. It will be attributed to you.

^ Make a concerted effort to avoid jargon.

^ It's perfectly acceptable to refuse to answer a question as long as you do it graciously and don't appear to be covering up.

^ If you aren't really sure of an answer, say so.

^ Don't use complicated statistics or dollar figures. People can't follow without a visual.

^ Refer to the interviewer by name occasionally.

^ Never lie.

^ Never lose your temper.

^ Don't be defensive.

News Media Contacts

Name and Address	Telephone Number	Editor	Reporter(s)	Deadlines & Comments
Valley Daily News 600 S. Washington Kent, WA 98032	872-6600	Steve Botkin	Irene Svete	Deadline Comments
Seattle Times 1229 W. Smith Street Kent, WA 98032	859-3695		Margaret Bakken	Deadline Comments
Tacoma News Tribune 32038 23rd Avenue South Federal Way, WA 98003	941-9636	John D. Komen	Editors Desk	Deadline Comments
Seattle PI 101 Elliott Avenue West Seattle, WA 98119	448-8042	J.D. Alexander	George Foster	Deadline Comments
				Deadline Comments

Seattle Television and Radio Stations

News Departments & Assignment Desks

Television

KOMO–TV (Channel 4)
100 Fourth North
Seattle, WA 98109
443–4145

KING–TV (Channel 5)
333 Dexter Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98124
448–3850

KIRO–TV (Channel 7)
2807 Third Avenue
Seattle, WA 98121
728–7777

KCTS–TV (Channel 9)
401 Mercer Street
Seattle, WA 98109
728-6463

KSTW–TV (Channel 11)
2033 6th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98121
441-1111

KCPQ–TV (Channel 13)
4400 Steilacoom Boulevard SW
Tacoma, WA 98499
625-1313

KTZZ-TV 22
945 Dexter N.
Seattle, WA 98109
282-2202

KVOS-TV
671-1212

Radio

KING
448-3640

KIRO
728-7777

KISW
285–7625

KIXI
622-3251

KFOX/KKFX
728–1250

KZOK
281–5627

KUOW
543–2710

KOMO
443-4101

KMPS
622–2512

KVI/KPLZ
223–5700

KLSY
454–1540

KJR
454-6397

KPLU
340-0230

KXRX
283-5979

KUBE
322-1622

KMGI
622-3251